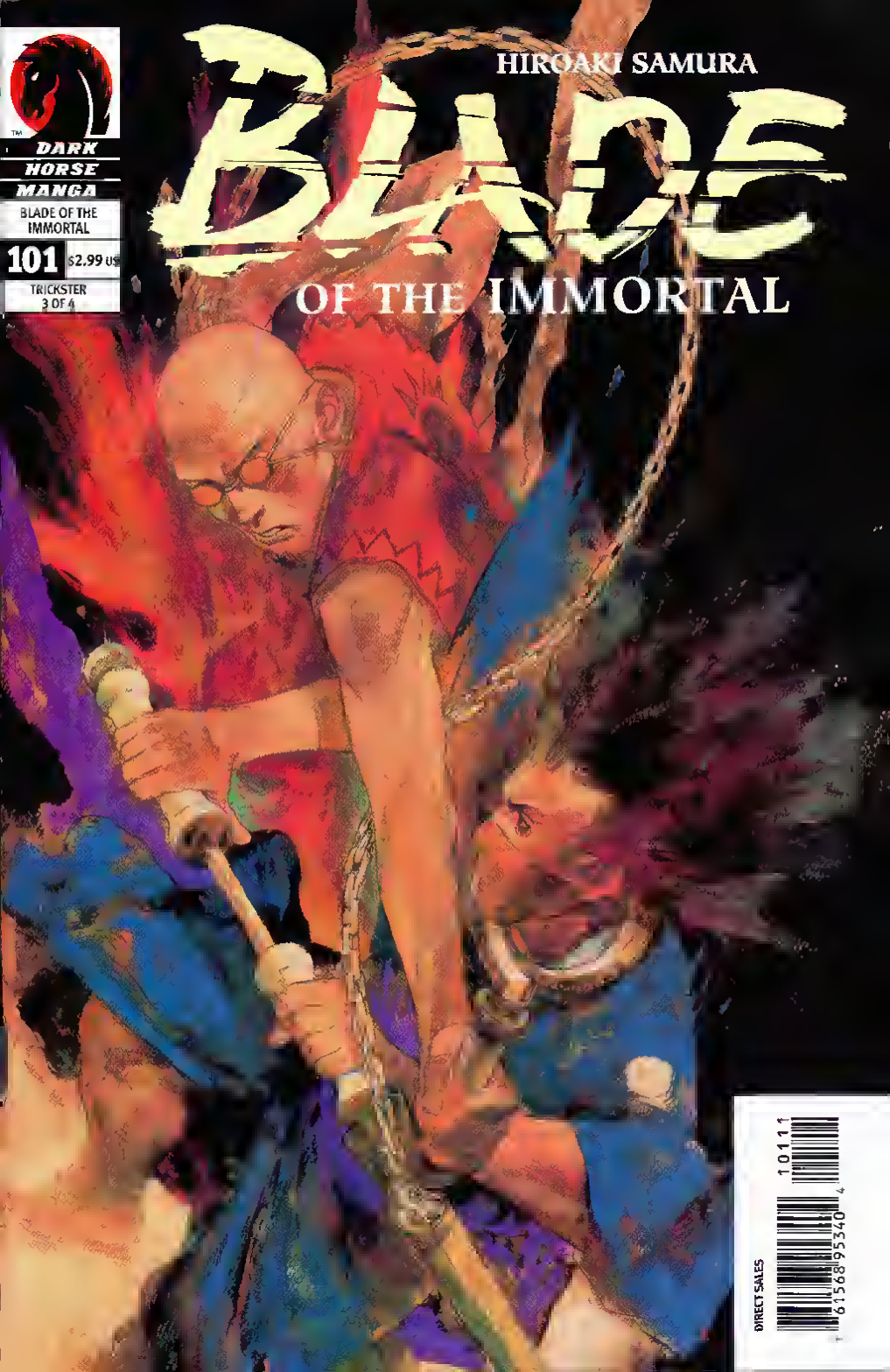
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS

lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi *ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū* seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU

The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

MAGATSU

Formidable Ittō-*ryū* swordsman

GUCHI

Mugai-*ryū* assassin

WAYAN KURISHIGE

Scarred, tenacious Ittō-*ryū* warrior

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

A surprise attack by the Mugai-*ryū* decimates a batch of new Ittō-*ryū* recruits, and Anotsu rallies his surviving troops to dish out swift vengeance. Manji agrees to meet with the head of the Mugai-*ryū*, but he must first rescue Rin from three Ittō-*ryū* heavies. Armed with *kessen-satsu*, the only poison known to damage Manji's immortal blood, these warriors clash with Manji and Guchi at the Ishioshigun Quarry. Making quick work of his first foe, Guchi now faces an enraged Magatsu...

designer DEBRA BAILEY editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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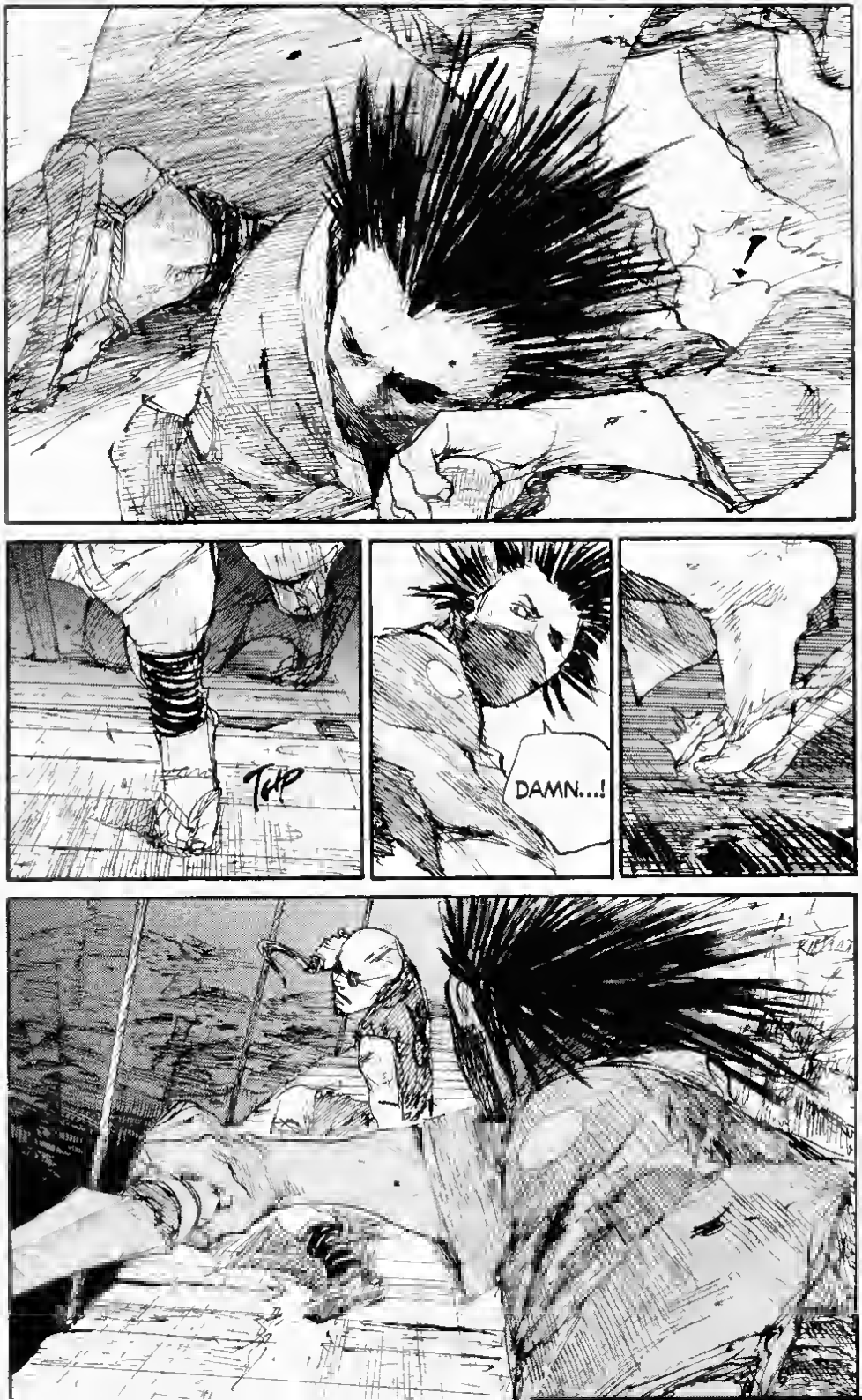
TRICKSTER
-part three-

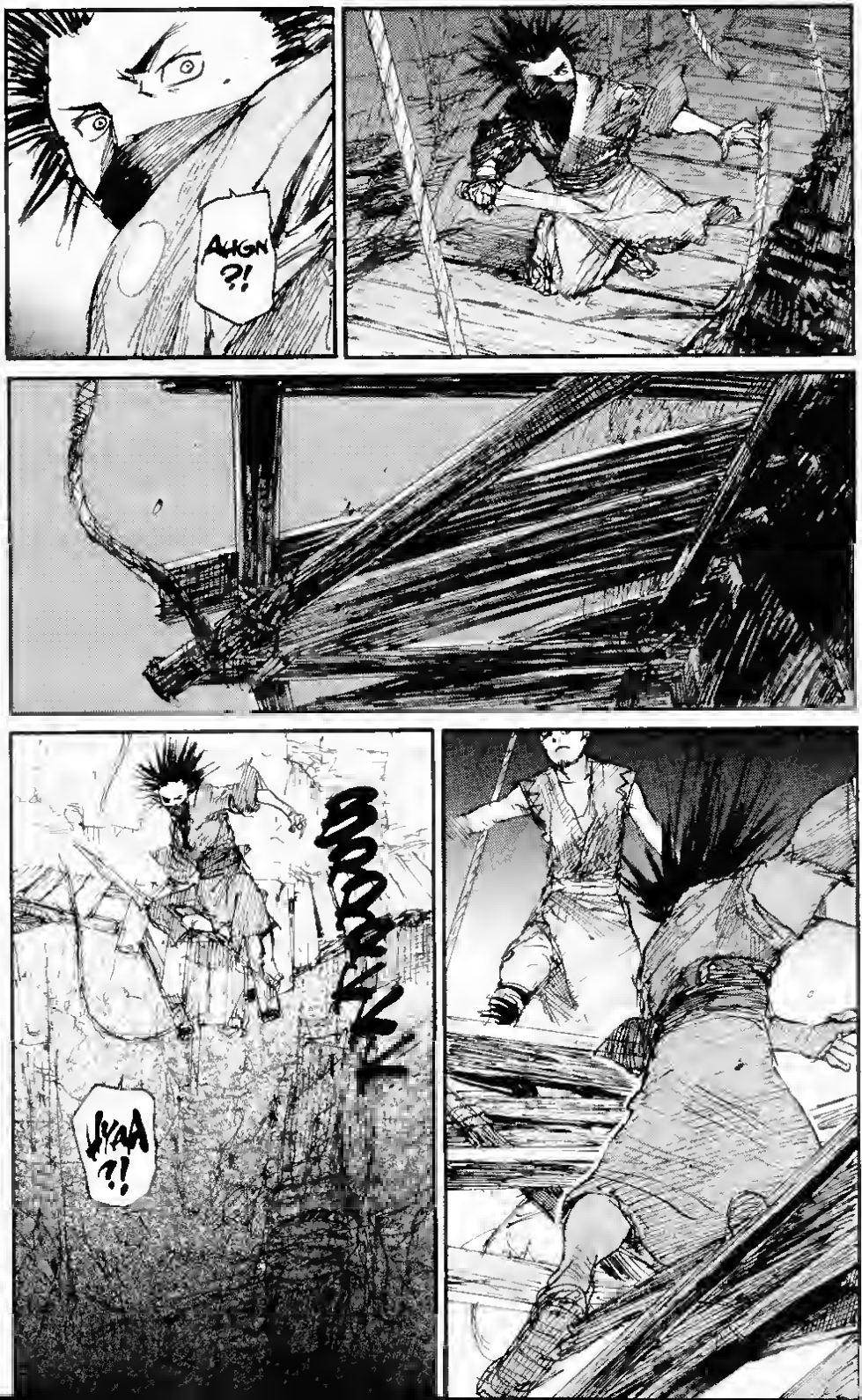
-hff-
-hff-

SHING

銀!
牙!
怒!
風!
SHK
WHO
KSHAK
!!

GOT
KAAHH
!!
SLSSH
FWH


!
TAP
DAMN...!

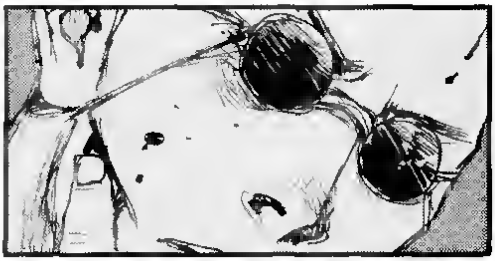

AHGN ?!
BOOOM
JYAA ?!

SKUSH!
?!

KWANG!
?
...GHOF...
GRRG...!

.....
.....
.....
BOK!
UNGN!
NGG!
GRRR!

HAH?!



BOY. KNOW WHY A MAN CAN'T FIGHT A BEAR AND WIN BARE-HANDED?
...STRENGTH...?
STRENGTH? AYE. THERE'S THAT. BE NO CREATURE FRAILER THAN MAN...
BUT STRANGE. HAIN'T IT? WE CAN'T EVEN BEAT ONES SMALLER'N US. HOUNDS. APES...

SO WHAT SEPARATES MAN AN' BEAST?
KNOWIN', BOY. KNOWIN' ABOUT DEATH.
WE THINK ABOUT IT. TOO MUCH. ALWAYS.
A WOUND, AN ILLNESS, AND IT GRABS OUR GUTS. "MAYBE I'LL DIE!" MAKES US WEAK.
THE BEASTS.
'COURSE THEY SEE DEATH IN THEIR LIVES.
BUT TOUGH FOR US, THEY DON'T KNOW WHEN A HURT MEANS DEATH.
WHAT'S THEIR POWER?
THE POWER OF IGNO-RANCE! NOT CARIN' ABOUT THEIR FLESH.
DEATH, BOY.
DEATH FALLS FIRST ON THE ONE WHO SEES IT.

GRRR
GRRR
GRRR

OLD MAN SEN. DOWN...
WHERE'S HIS... LEFT SIDE...?
...MAYBE HE'S... DEAD...?
MY LEFT EYE'S CRUSHED. BUT I FEEL... NOTHING.
IS IT THE SAME FOR HIM...?

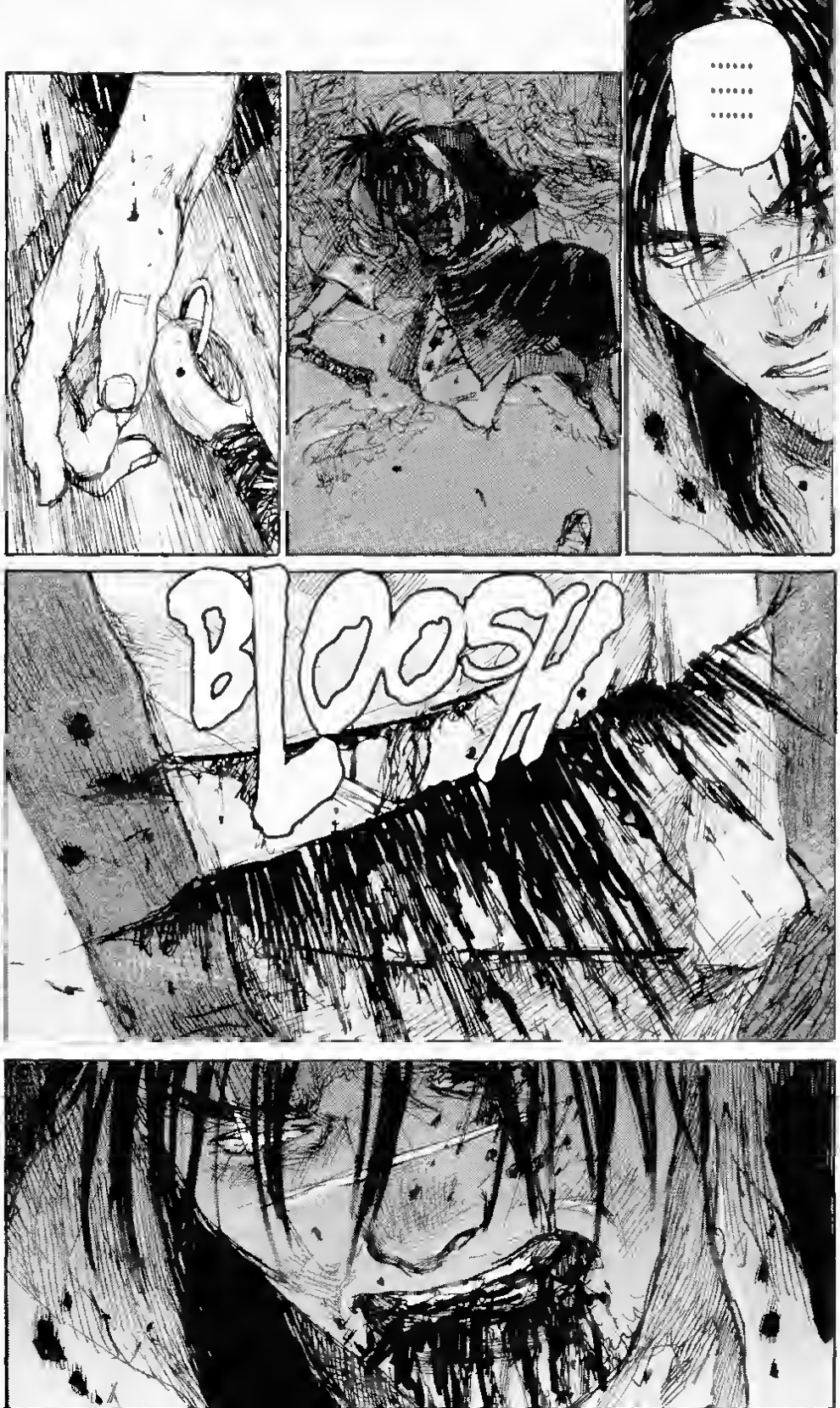
GUN WON'T DO IT.
TO TEACH HIM FEAR...
GRRAAW AGU!

DEATH
COMES!
GAAAH!!

...TO
YOU!!

SHRAKK!
!!
UUAA
USH!!

SKRRRRK!


.....
.....
.....
BLOOSH!

NNGN...
.....
.....
.....
...AHNG...!
KILLER OF...
...A HUNDRED... HAVE I KILLED YOU?!
TO BE CONTINUED...!

LETTERS

send letters to:
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GLOSSARY

dōjō: a school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.
Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.
kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.
kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.
Mugai-ryū: criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets.
ryū: a sword school

Samura-dono's "Trickster" storyline will conclude next issue. Feeling the effects of *kessen-satsu* poisoning, Manji is vulnerable, falling apart, and swinging in the dark! Will the vindictive Ittō-*ryū* noose finally close in around his neck? Gilchi ... Magatsu ... did either survive their fall into the dark quarry? Also, we'll print some great *Blade of the Immortal*-inspired fan art pieces. Keep 'em coming, please! See you next month, when a main character weeps and gets a hug! (No lie.)

–Philip Simon

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, all of our manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

HIROAKI SAMURA

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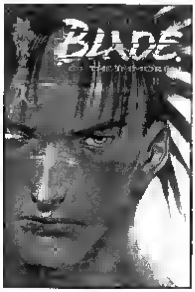

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